



Children of Syria ... The drowned hope

Universal Children's Day... Syria: The Worst Place in the World

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Violations Committed by Government Forces
- III. Violations Committed by Russian Forces
- IV. Violations Committed by Kurdish Self Management Forces
- V. Violations Committed by Extremist Islamic Groups
- VI. Violations Committed by International Coalition Forces
- VII. Children and Displacement
- VIII. Recommendations Acknowledgments

I. Executive Summary:

Four ongoing years of bloodshed, destruction, shelling and killing had its adverse effects on Syrian children. We recorded by name and image the death of 18858 children who were killed by government forces, including 582 children who were killed by sniper bullets. Not less than 10413 children were arrested, not less than 159 children died under torture in government prisons and sexual abuse was committed against several children.

Kurdish Self Management Forces (KSM) killed 46 children and arrested not less than 194 children to be forcibly recruited. International Coalition forces killed 75 children since its air-strikes commenced on 23 September 2014, while Russian forces killed not less than 86 children since 30 September 2015. Syrian children were not spared from other violations. ISIL killed 229 children, arrested not less than 595 children and recruited hundreds of them. Al Nusra Front killed 46 children and arrested not less than 84.

Armed Opposition Groups killed 603 children, arrested not less than 1021 children and used some of them in military actions. The siege that has been imposed on Eastern Ghouta caused severe cases of malnutrition. The ongoing conflict deprived not less than 2.1 million children of education in Syria since their schools were shelled destroyed or became military locations for government forces. Not less than 20 thousand children have become fatherless and almost 5 thousand children became motherless.





Not less than 117000 children were born in refugee camps which many of them did not obtain any identification documents. These children, who have been growing up in tents or camps, are deprived from the most essential human rights, the right of living in dignity, obtaining identification cards, the right of obtaining citizenship, and the right of receiving proper education.

II. Violations Perpetrated by the Syrian Government

A. Extrajudicial Killing:

SNHR has documented the names, pictures, videos, place and date of death of not less than 18858 children who were killed by government forces since March 2011. Those children were killed by various kinds of weapons including indiscriminate missile shelling, artillery, and cluster munitions, poison gases, barrel bombs, and sharp weapons in many massacres of a sectarian-cleansing nature in Homs, Banyas, Jadedat Al-Fadel in Damascus countryside, Al-Qalamoun in Damascus countryside, Hama northern countryside, and Aleppo suburbs.

Out of the 18858 children who were killed by the Syrian regime, 582 were killed by sniper bullets. The snipers were fully aware that they were targeting children as it was docu-





mented in the report “Hunting Humans” that was published by SNHR. Furthermore, 159 children were tortured to death inside the Syrian regime’s detention centers.

Moreover, the percentage of children victims exceeds 7% which is a high percentage that indicates the deliberate targeting of civilians by the government forces.

1. On 5 March 2015, SNHR documented the death of 5 children who were killed due to warplane shelling by government forces on an elementary school in Idlib in Beir Arminza town.

2. On 15 May 2015, government warplanes launched two thermal rockets on a commercial center in Menbij city in Aleppo which killed 3 children.

1. On 8 July 2015, SNHR documented the death of three children who suffocated to death after government warplanes dropped a barrel bomb that was loaded with a toxic gas on Al Sheikh Yaseen neighborhood in Deir Al Zour.

B. Arrests, Enforced Disappearances and Torture:

More than 99% of the arrests conducted by the Syrian government are being done without a legal memorandum and without informing the family of the detained child of the charges or the place of detention. Also, we documented many cases where the father and the son were arrested together as a way to press on the father where he was forced to watch his son being tortured. The family is not allowed to hire an attorney, the child is usually subjected to brutal torture, and the arbitrary arrest becomes enforced-disappearance in many cases.

Government forces arrest children because they were involved in revolutionary activities, social-networking websites, or the media or relief field in addition to tens of cases where the children were arrested in order to press on the father to give himself in.

SNHR documented not less than 10413 children who experienced imprisonment. Also, SNHR estimates that there are more than 1850 enforced-disappeared children. The Syrian government denies that it detains any children despite the families’ testimonies that affirm that it were government forces that raided and arrested their sons. Additionally, some pictures that were aired on the official TV channel showed children and women inside Aleppo Central Prison.

Child Ahmad Mouneer Al Rahimo from Al Kaweem town in Hama suburbs, 12 years old, was arrested on 12 March 2015 by government forces in Hama. His fate is still unknown for SNHR and his family as well.

On 21 June 2015, SNHR documented the arrest of an adolescent, 17, in Daraya city in Damascus suburbs. He was arrested from his residence in Damascus and he was taken to Branch 215. His fate is still unknown to SNHR and his family.





Children in Syria are subjected to almost the same torture methods as adult men. SNHR documented in an extensive report the use of 46 different torture methods at least at the security branches in Syria. The brutal torture caused the death of not less than 159 children most of them died inside the security branches.

C. Siege:

Government forces have used siege as a weapon of war to submit the opposition-held areas and to press on civilians. Children were affected the most by the policy that caused many cases of malnutrition and drought among the children of Syria not to mention the diseases which spread in light of the environmental pollution as the pile of garbage and the damaged drainage wastes have become alarmingly noticeable in Damascus countryside – Eastern Ghouta.

SNHR has documented since the beginning of the Syrian revolution the death of 202 children who died due to lack of food and medication in different besieged areas.

D. Deprivation of Education:

The Syrian government's indiscriminate shelling targeted not less than 4017 schools, more than half of which are now out of commission. SNHR was able to acquire audio recordings of pilots saying to their officers: "There is no clear target" and the officer responded: "Shell any residential gathering". This forced many of the families to stop sending their children to school out of fear that they might be killed. Furthermore, homelessness rates increased significantly because of displacement and the destruction of many residential buildings and also because of extreme poverty as many shops and workplaces were destroyed or

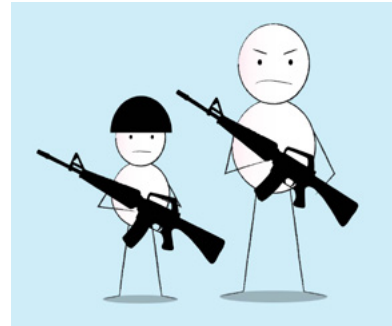




because the absence of the house provider who wither was killed or arrested which forced many children to work to provide for their families. Estimations suggest that there are more than 2.1 million out-of-school children in Syria.

E. Recruitment:

The Syrian government armed its militias (mainly Shiite), which are fighting with the government forces. This was primarily in Lattakia, Tartus, Hama northern suburbs, and Homs countryside. Even though, most of the recruited children operate at checkpoints; evidences have shown that they are being used also in surveillance operations and direct military actions.



Through monitoring the Syrian militias' websites and social networks, where they mourn some of the dead fighters, we noticed over the last year that increasing numbers of killed and wounded children which prove that the Syrian regime is increasingly using children.

- On 16 February 2015, government forces arrested nearly 9 children in Najer Aisha in Damascus city. Their ages ranged between 15 to 17 years old as they were taken to the frontlines in Al Ghouta in Damascus where they were forced to dig a trench for the government's army. They were released two days later.

F. Sexual Violence:

Since 2015 and up till the end of October 2015, we recorded not less than 436 sexual abuse cases against children. However, what has been documented is only a minor fraction compared to the estimations, indicators, and testimonies that suggest that there are a considerably high number of sexual violence cases. Also, we recorded several cases of enforced marriages for underage females who forcibly married members from government forces. On 28 February 2015, a [video](#) published on youtube depicted several members from government forces in their military uniforms celebrating the marriage of a government militia of leader, called Moueen Dyoub also known as Abu Meezer, to an 18 years old female in one of Aleppo's towns.

On 22 March 2015, a video published on youtube depicted five member from government forces in northern Homs suburbs who arrested a 13 years old boy. They stripped him naked, tortured and molested him. He also hit him on his genitals. SNHR was not able to identify the child's fate up to the moment of making this report.





III. Violations Committed by Russian Forces:

On 30 September 2015, Russian forces commenced air strikes on Syria and announced that it will target extremist Islamic groups (i.e. ISIL, An-Nusra Front, and Jund Al Aqsa group). However, their actions on the ground contradicted statements made Russian officials. It seems that these air strikes deliberately killed civilians and targeted regions that were never under the control of extremist Islamic groups.

On 13 October 2015, SNHR documented the death of 5 children in alleged Russian shelling on a mosque in Hayyan town in Aleppo governorate.

On 15 October 2015, SNHR documented the death of 33 children after alleged Russian warplanes launched a rocket on a residential building for a displaced family.

IV. Violations Committed by Kurdish Self Management Forces (or PYD forces):

Kurdish forces joined other conflict parties in Syria in July 2012 when YPG forces, (the armed wing of the PYD party), established the Kurdish Self-Management Forces which was announced in January 2014 and seized control over some regions in north and east of Syria. The PYD party constitutes the main core of the movement that was called later on the “Kurdish Self-Management Forces”. SNHR documented many violation perpetrated in Kurds-held areas including extrajudicial killing and enforced recruitment.

A. Extrajudicial killing

SNHR documented the death of 46 children who were killed by the Kurdish Self Management Forces (KSM) since its establishment.

- On 23 May 2015, child Haytham Essa Al Shimali, born in 2012, was killed by KSM sniper bullets in Abu Al Shakhat town.
- On 21 June 2015, child Alaa Ahmad Al Ahmad, born in 2001, was killed by KSM bullets in Al Jawadeya town. The victim was killed while trying to escape arrest by the KSM forces.

B. Arrests, Enforced Disappearances and Torture:

SNHR documented the arrest of 194 children by KSM forces since its establishment.

- On 26 May 2015, KSM armed members arrested child [Jilan Akram Omar](#) from Al Qameshli city in Al Hassaka governorate. She was 14 years old and she was released on 29 May 2015.
- On 20 June 2015, KSM forces stormed Al Ayhamer and Khirbit Al Ahyamer towns and arrested 5 individuals, including a child, Yawour Youssef Al Salem Al Abo.





C. Enforced Recruitment:

We recorded the enforced recruitment of not less than 1876 children in different regions in Aleppo and Al Hassaka suburbs. Children were forced to participate in battles, fights and searching checkpoints. Children have been forced to use and train on using guns since 2012 extensively.

- On 4 April 2015, KSM forces arrested child [Dilber Ahmad Hajji](#), 16, from EIn Arab region which is also known as Kobani in Aleppo. The aim of the arrest was enforced recruitment.

V. Violations Committed by Extremist Islamic Groups:

i. ISIL:

A. Extrajudicial Killing:

ISIL has conducted many attacks at the beginning of 2014 in Al-Raqqa, Deir Al Zour, Al-Hassaka, and Aleppo countryside. This group managed to take over wide areas and also shelled some of the government forces areas. The indiscriminate shelling and clashes, in which ISIL was involved, resulted in the killing of no less than 229 children who are documented by name, picture, place and time of death.

On 30 March 2015, SNHR documented the death of two children who were killed by ISIL after it stormed Al Mabou'ja town in Hama suburbs.

On 1 June 2015, ISIL killed 3 children due to shelling with heavy artillery on Um Al Housh town in Aleppo suburbs.

A. Arrests and Enforced Disappearances:

ISIL arrested in its areas no less than 595 children, most of who were from families that opposed the faction's policies. We do not have much information about them.

B. Enforced Recruitment:

ISIL fighters used children in some direct and indirect military operations such as guarding, cooking, cleaning weapons etc... This group promoted the culture of carrying weapons among children through conducting training courses to train them. The faction opened a number of camps to train children on how to carry weapons and other hostilities. ISIL called these camps "Al-Ashbal camps". Such camps can be found in Al Raqqa and Al-Bab city in Aleppo. Furthermore, many schools were turned into centers and camps for training. ISIL exploited the poor living conditions where it attracted hundreds of children through paying them low amounts of money; this one of the main reasons why children join the faction.





C. Sexual Violence:

ISIL published an article, in its magazine “Dabeq”, titled: “Reviving Slavery before Judgment Day” to religiously justify its opinions about reestablishing slavery and, therefore, apprehending and selling Yazidi women and children in slavery markets. In the same article, a document shows the prices of women and children who were kidnapped from Yazidi-Iraqi areas in August 2014 and then were taken to Al-Raqqa city.

- Ahmad E., from Al Raqqa city, 14 years old, was displaced with his family from his city in early 2013 towards Kelles city in southern Turkey in January 2015. He left his family and ran back to Al Raqqa to join ISIL with two of his friends. ISIL trained him in the following recruitment camps for three months: Akrayshi, Ousama Bin Laden, Caliphate Cubs, and Al Zarkawi Cubs

Also, SNHR documented the rape of a child in one of ISIL’s children recruitment camps in Al Raqqa city. This crime was perpetrated by a leader in ISIL in Al Raqqa.

D. Deprivation of Education:

The status of education deteriorated after it was taken over by ISIL mainly because the faction turned some of the schools into center and training locations and also because of the deteriorated security situation in light of the ongoing clashes. ISIL imposed restriction on the curriculum where he ruled out some of the subjects and add others in addition to separating boys from girls.

ii. Al Nusra Front:

A. Extrajudicial Killing:

SNHR documented the death of 46 children who were killed by Al Nusra Front since it was established in January 2012.

On 10 June 2015, Al Nusra front killed two children due to random firing next to Kalb Al Lawza town in Idlib.

B. Arrests and Enforced Disappearances:

SNHR estimates the number of arrested children by Al Nusra Front by 84 children in regions under its control.

C. Enforced Recruitment:

Al Nusra Front launched several and widespread recruitment campaigns for children. These recruitment campaigns were included in school’s curriculums in regions under its control. They made some students wear the military suit as a custom inside schools and forced the fathers (who are members in it) to force their children to go to those camps and schools.





VI. Violations Committed by Armed Opposition Groups:

A. Extrajudicial Killing:

SNHR documented the killing of 603 children at the hands of different armed opposition groups. Most of those children were killed by the opposition forces' indiscriminate shelling that targeted some of the Syrian regime areas especially using mortar shells.

1. On 5 February 2015, SNHR recorded the death of a child due to armed opposition groups' shelling on Al Sabaa' Bahrat in Damascus.

2. On 15 June 2015, armed opposition groups killed 4 children due to artillery missiles on residential houses in Al Neil Street in Aleppo.

B. Arrests, Torture and Arbitrary Arrests:

SNHR recorded the arrest of not less than 1021 children by armed opposition groups.

On 27 August 2015, an armed opposition group arrested child Ma'youf Al Jassem, born in 1999 from Dghaylib town in Raqqa suburbs. SNHR was not able to identify its whereabouts or fate up to the moment of making this report.

C. Recruitment:

As tens of thousands of shops and factories were destroyed, poverty overwhelmed many areas of Syria. Also, as many children lost their fathers, providers, and friends, they were suffering from difficult psychological conditions, depression, and what appears to be a grim future. All of these factors drove hundreds of children to join the armed brigades.

A number of armed faction leaders told us that they accept children and let them participate in a variety of tasks within the brigade. They said that it was better than letting them fall to homelessness, the underworld, and exploitation at work.

Although the armed groups are not an international party and, thus, it is not bound by the optional protocol which establish that the minimum age for direct recruitment is 18-year-old, it is bound by the international humanitarian law which sees that the minimum age is 15-year-old. Certainly, there are hundreds of children younger than 15-year-old working with armed groups which is a war crime.

VII. Violations Committed by International Coalition Forces:

Since 23 September 2014, International Coalition forces joined the four major conflict parties in Syria. These military operations that were carried by the International Coalition on Raqqa, Deir Al Zour and Idlib were usually associated with humanitarian and materials damages and loss. Not less than 75 children died due to the international coalition shelling up to the moment of making this report.





- On 1 May 2015, international coalition forces launched several rockets on residential houses in Beir Mahali town in Aleppo which killed 31 children.
- On 6 June 2015, international coalition forces launched several thermal rockets on Dali Hassan town in Aleppo which killed 6 children.

VIII. Syrian Children in Refugee Camps

There are about 2.9 million Syrian children refugees. We met many of them inside and outside the camps. The most notable difficulties from which the Syrian child suffers in refugee camps are:

- 1- Many children refugees are without their fathers who were either killed or choose to have their families leave the country out of fear for their lives.
- 2- Even though many children at refugee camps in Jordan and Turkey can go out every day, the situation is different in Lebanon where the child can't even leave his tent for a whole month. Also, more than one family lives in one house.
- 3- Most of the children refugees are deprived of education, the percentage of out-of-school children differ from one country to another. However, the average is that 45% of children refugees are out-of-school children.
- 4- The Syrian child in refugee camps is denied of a citizenship. More than 117000 children were born in refugee camps. Many of them were denied their rightful nationality because the child carries his father's nationality and even if the father is present, he must have a





marriage license according to the Syrian law. It should be taken into consideration that many fathers are either missing or forcibly-disappeared and a large portion of them don't have any documents.

5- Severe mental disorders as a result of the broken families, lack of security, displacement, the pictures of blood and destruction that those children witnessed for about four years, loss of families, loss of hope, and social difficulties where many of them were forced to work.

6- Blackmailing and trafficking.

7- Many of the Syrian children in refugee camps are injured and wounded.

Recommendations

To The International Community and the United Nations

SNHR publishes many studies and reports on the various kinds of violations that are being perpetrated in Syria. We believe that the children crisis in Syria is a part of the main crisis. Without a solution to the Syrian crisis, the childhood crisis will continue complicating radically and its effects will last for the years to come.

The Syrian crisis is mainly a humanitarian crisis caused by human rights violations even though it is described as a geopolitical crisis which is only an attempt to escape the confrontation of the reality of the Syrian crisis.

The international community is certainly able to ease the impact of the crisis by executing the Security Council resolutions even though they were adopted after it was too late. No one is talking anymore about resolution 2139 and putting an end to the indiscriminate attacks that has been carried out since 22 February. These attacks killed no less than 1483 documented children by name, picture, and video. Furthermore, eight children were killed by poison gases because the Security Council failed to implement resolution 2118.

Even in regard with resolution 2139 and 2165, which were on delivering humanitarian aids, we are still seeing children in besieged areas (Eastern Ghouta and Daraya in Damascus countryside and Al-Wa'er neighborhood in Homs) dying from hunger and cold and a new winter is nearing.

UNHCHR should publish extensive reports on the violations against children in Syria. Also, it should focus more on the crimes of enforced-disappearance, torture, arresting and killing children. We are willing to cooperate about any of the cases that this report included. Moreover, we urge the International Investigation Commission to pay greater attention the reports of SNHR and to coordinate in order to follow the investigations regarding the crimes this report included.

All the states that are helping and supplying the Syrian government with money, weapons, and militias are undoubtedly considered as partner in its crimes and also the states that are supporting armed groups who are involved in war crimes.





The international community must work to reach a political solution in order to stop the daily bloodbath and hold the individuals who are responsible for all the violations accountable.

Many of these violations can be classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity. SNHR urges all the relevant organizations and agencies to work to refer the Syrian case to the I.C.C. Since China and Russia are insisting on supporting the impunity of the criminals, the U.N. should form a special court for Syria as soon as possible.

To The Neighboring Countries

To insure the right of the Syrian refugees to a safe shelter and respect their rights including prohibiting forcible return. Furthermore, the EU countries should help the neighboring countries by housing more Syrian refugees. Additionally, the donor countries must increase its aids to the UNHCR and the local civil-society organization in the states that have Syrian refugees.

Acknowledgment

Our thanks and appreciation goes to the victims' families, friends, and relatives, and to the local and media activist who majorly contributed to this report.

